

# SAN FRANCISCO BAY CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

50 California Street • Suite 2600 • San Francisco, California 94111 • (415) 352-3600 • Fax: (415) 352-3606 • [www.bcdc.ca.gov](http://www.bcdc.ca.gov)

July 31, 2008

**TO:** All Design Review Board Members

**FROM:** Will Travis, Executive Director [415/352-3653 [travis@bcdc.ca.gov](mailto:travis@bcdc.ca.gov)]  
Kerri Davis, Coastal Program Analyst [415/352-3617 [kerrid@bcdc.ca.gov](mailto:kerrid@bcdc.ca.gov)]

**SUBJECT: Opus Center Sierra Point Project, City of Brisbane, San Mateo County; First Review**  
(For Board consideration on August 11, 2008)

## Project Summary

**Project Sponsors:** Opus West, BKF Engineering

**Project Representatives:** Randy Ackerman, Jonas Vass, Kurt Culver, and others

**Project Site.** The 8.87-acre project site is located on the Sierra Point Peninsula in the City of Brisbane, San Mateo County. The project site is bounded by a drainage slough and the U.S. Highway 101 northbound on-ramp and travel lanes to the west, the San Francisco Bay to the north, Marina Boulevard to the southeast, and office buildings and parking to the east and south. The San Francisco Bay Trail runs along the northern portion of the property and terminates at the northwestern corner of the project site (see Exhibit 1). Of the 8.87 acres (386,377 square feet), approximately 30,800 square feet are within the Commission's shoreline band jurisdiction. The existing site is mostly upland open space, containing native, non-native, and invasive plant species (see Exhibit 2). The project site slopes down to the north towards the San Francisco Bay, from approximately 18 feet above mean sea level (MSL) to approximately 5 feet above MSL. Two stockpile mounds of soil located on the site range in height from 21 to 35 feet high. Because the project site was a former landfill, the area is underlain by approximately 75 to 100 feet of fill, refuse, and weak, compressible marine clay. The project site is accessible from Marina Boulevard and is regionally accessible from U.S. Highway 101 via the southbound Sierra Point Parkway freeway ramps and northbound ramps located to the south of the project site.

**Existing Public Access.** The City of Brisbane holds a public access easement running parallel to the San Francisco Bay shoreline. The existing San Francisco Bay trail currently runs through the easement, along the northern perimeter of the property and terminates at the northwestern corner of the project site. The San Francisco Bay Trail located within the project site (both existing and new trail extension) would be dedicated as public access. A separate public access trail runs north/south from Marina Boulevard to the San Francisco Bay Trail and is located on far west side of the Foster Enterprise Parcel which borders the eastern property line of the project site.

**Proposed Project.** The proposed development includes grading and landfill closure activities for the former landfill as well as construction of an office center containing two office buildings and a parking garage (see Exhibit 4). Within the Commission's jurisdiction, only public access



Advancing San Francisco Bay Restoration

improvements, a private outdoor terrace, a fire access lane, and open space would be developed. The office buildings would include an approximately 195,000-square-foot, eight-story office building (approximately 125 feet high) and an approximately 250,000-square-foot, ten-story building (approximately 152 feet high). The proposed parking garage would consist of five stories and be approximately 377,000 square feet (approximately 50 feet high). Additionally, the proposed

project includes improvements to and an extension of the San Francisco Bay Trail, including landscaping, lighting, seating, and trail surface improvements (see Exhibit 2). The extension of the trail will start from the current termination point at the northwestern corner of the property, and run along the western and southern boundaries of the project site. The extension would then connect to the sidewalk frontage running parallel to Marina Boulevard at the southeastern corner of the project site. A twenty-foot-wide fire access lane would be constructed adjacent to the northern portion of the Bay Trail as mandated by the North County Fire Authority.

**Phasing.** The proposed public access improvements for this project would occur in one phase, although construction of the office buildings and parking structure may occur over two phases. If construction of the office buildings and parking structure were multi-phased, the public access improvements would be constructed in the primary phase.

**Public Access Issues.** The staff believes that the project raises three primary issues for the Board to address in its review: (1) whether the proposed project provides adequate connections to and continuity along the shoreline and enhances visual access to the Bay and shoreline; (2) whether the proposed project provides adequate, usable and attractive public access spaces; and (3) whether the proposed public access is sited and designed to be compatible with wildlife.

1. **Are the connections to the proposed public access areas adequate to lead the public to and along the project site and are the view corridors adequate to provide visual access to the Bay and shoreline?** The San Francisco Bay Plan, Public Access policies state that, “[p]ublic access improvements provided as a condition of any approval should be consistent with the project and the physical environment, including protection of the Bay natural resources, such as aquatic life, wildlife and plant communities, and provide for the public’s safety and convenience. The improvements should be designed and built to encourage diverse Bay-related activities and movement to and along the shoreline, should permit barrier free access for the physically handicapped, and should be identified with appropriate signs....”(Policy No. 6.). Additionally, the policies state, “Public access should be sited, designed and managed to prevent significant adverse effects on wildlife;”(Policy No. 4), and “[a]ccess to and along the waterfront should be provided by walkways, trails, or other appropriate means and connect to the nearest public thoroughfare.... (Policy No. 8.)” *The Public Access Design Guidelines* state that, “access areas are utilized most if they provide direct connections to public rights-of-way such as streets and sidewalks...” and “should be planned in collaboration with local governments” to provide for future connections. The *Guidelines* further state that this may be accomplished by “providing connections perpendicular to the shoreline at regular intervals...to maximize the opportunities for accessing and viewing the Bay.” The *Guidelines* also recommend “locating buildings, structures...and landscaping...such that they enhance and dramatize views of the Bay and the shoreline from public thoroughfares and other public spaces” and “organizing shoreline development to allow Bay views and access between buildings.”

The project sponsors are proposing a resurfacing of the existing Bay Trail and the construction of a Bay Trail extension that would run along the western and southern perimeters of the project site. Landscaping and lighting would be constructed adjacent to the existing trail and trail extension. Seating would be provided along the northern portion of the Bay Trail located within the project site. When the project is complete, continuous public access would exist around the entire perimeter of the project site as well as throughout the project site.

The Board should advise the Commission and the project sponsors on whether the proposed project provides adequate connections from nearby public streets, and from the existing Bay Trail segment from the east. The Board should also advise whether view corridors from the nearest public streets to the south have been adequately included, to provide visual access to the Bay and shoreline and lead the public to the public access spaces. In addition, advice from the Board is sought on whether the buildings, structures and landscaping enhance and dramatize views of the Bay and shoreline from the public streets and the public access areas.

2. **Does the proposed project provide adequate, usable, and attractive public access spaces?** The *Public Access Design Guidelines* state that public access spaces should be “designed and built to encourage diverse, Bay-related activities along the shoreline”, to create a “sense of place”, and “designed for a wide range of users”. The *Guidelines* further state, “[v]iew opportunities, shoreline configuration and access points are factors that determine a site’s inherent public access opportunities.” Additionally, the *Guidelines* further state that one should “design public access so that the user is not intimidated nor is the user’s appreciation diminished by large nearby building masses, structures, or incompatible uses.”

The existing public access consists of an 8-foot-wide asphalt path along the northern portion of the project site. The existing public access would be resurfaced with colored asphalt and widened to be consistent with the look of the new trail extension. The new trail extension would consist of an 8-foot-wide asphalt path running along the western and southern perimeters of the project site. A new Bay overlook would be constructed at the northwestern corner of the project site. In addition, benches would be located adjacent to the existing trail for public seating. Five public parking spaces would be provided on the project site located adjacent to the public access running along the eastern property line. New landscaping and lighting would be provided along the existing and new trails as well as throughout the project site.

The Board should advise the Commission and the project sponsors whether the proposed public access areas are sufficient to accommodate the expected level of use, designed to take advantage of existing site characteristics and opportunities, are safe and secure, and include appropriate site amenities. Additionally, the Board should advise the Commission and the project sponsors on whether the proposed location for the seating area is appropriate to maximize opportunities for sitting, viewing, picnicking, and wildlife observation.

3. **Is the public access sited and designed to be compatible with wildlife utilizing the project site?** The *San Francisco Bay Plan* policies on public access state that, “public access should be sited, designed and managed to prevent significant adverse effects on wildlife.” In many locations around the Bay, the shoreline edge is a vital area for wildlife. Access to some wildlife areas allows visitors to discover, experience, and appreciate the Bay’s natural resources and can foster public support for Bay resource protection. However, in some cases, public access may have adverse effects on wildlife (including flushing, increased stress, interrupted foraging, and/or nest abandonment), and may result in adverse long-term population and species effects. Methods for avoiding adverse effects of public access on wildlife include: (1) using design elements to encourage or discourage specific types of human activities; (2) providing spur trails to reduce informal access into and through more sensitive areas; (3) using physical design features to buffer wildlife from human use; (4) managing type and location of public use; and (5) incorporating educational and interpretive elements within public access areas.

The project sponsors have proposed several design features incorporated into their project to educate the public and minimize potential disturbance to the plants, fish, and wildlife. These design features include: (1) replacing the existing San Francisco Bay Trail with a 8-foot-wide colored asphalt sidewalk/bike path with bench seating along the shoreline, providing a way for the public to discover, experience, and appreciate views of San Francisco Bay; (2) constructing a fence along the northwestern corner of the project site to reduce public and domestic animal intrusion on potential California Clapper Rail habitat; (3) replanting landscaping to fill in current access point leading to potential California Clapper Rail habitat;

(4) installing interpretive signs at the Bay overlook to educate the public about the history, ecology, and sensitive nature of the Bay's natural resources.

The Board should advise the Commission and the project sponsors on whether the proposed public access employs appropriate siting, design, and management strategies (such as fencing or use restrictions) to reduce or prevent adverse human and wildlife interactions. The Board should also advise the Commission and the project sponsors on whether the proposed project provides the public with diverse and satisfying public access opportunities that focus activities in designated areas and avoid habitat fragmentation, vegetation trampling, and erosion.